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# DMV quiet on license fraud case

More than 100 people received illegal documents

By Tonya Maxwell  
STAFF WRITER

**ASHEVILLE** — Division of Motor Vehicles officials would not say Tuesday whether they will try to track down more than 100 people federal prosecutors allege were issued fraudulent driver licenses and identification cards.

An indictment unsealed last week charges a DMV worker in Asheville with issuing licenses and identi-

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See this story online at **CITIZEN-TIMES.com** to link to other articles about the DMV investigation. Also view the indictment against former driver license examiner Renee Jones

cation cards for up to \$1,000 apiece to people ineligible because of immigration status, lack of vehicle insurance and criminal convictions.

Former driver license examiner, Renee Friedman Jones, 51, of Asheville, was

## Inside

■ Prominent Haywood Democrat who's traffic ticket launched DMV probe pleads guilty to drunken-driving charge.  
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indicted on two counts alleging she issued licenses to people ineligible for the documents from mid-2003 to March.

DMV spokesman Bill Jones said Tuesday that he could not say what would happen to people who got the fraudulent licenses and identification cards because of an ongoing investigation.

Advocates of driver license reform say lax oversight can open a community to criminals, open the nation to terrorism and encourage illegal immigration.

Arrests in a Western North Carolina drug ring — one that has since resulted in several guilty pleas — first led Drug Enforcement Agents to investigate the alleged license-for-cash fraud.

Loose restrictions on issuing driver licenses was cited following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks as a national security threat.

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# DMV: Street value of driver licenses, ID cards can be high

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The General Accounting Office last year warned Congress that steps to tighten procedures by better identifying applicants had not gone far enough. Hijackers involved in the attacks had dozens of driver licenses.

The Jones indictment alleges two men, Isidro Hernandez-Ramos and Jaime Arroyo Resendiz, would send people ineligible for North Carolina driving privileges to Jones, who was fluent in Spanish. She, in turn, would issue fraudulent licenses, according to the indictment.

Hernandez-Ramos would be paid \$500 for a learner's permit or an identification card and \$1,000 for a driver license, a sum that would be split evenly with Jones, the indictment alleges.

Hernandez-Ramos and Resendiz are not DMV employees and have not been charged with helping to issue the licenses and permits.

Renee Jones has declined comment. Her attorney, Charles Brewer, said Tuesday the case should be tried in the courts and not in the media. Jones separated from the DMV July 23. Public record laws do not require the agency to say whether she quit or was fired.

Driver licenses are the most important identity documents in the United States today, often opening the door to airplane travel, employment, apartment

rental as well as providing access to other documents, said James Staudenraus, a field director for the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

The group advocates for a halt to illegal immigration, and Staudenraus said he has focused on securing driver licenses since the 2001 terrorist attacks.

The street value of licenses is high, and DMV workers, who are often paid little, can be tempted to sell the documents, he said.

Staudenraus praised his home state of New York, which he says has oversight measures such as requiring two DMV employees to check documents and random audits.

"For members of drug gangs, terrorists, criminals, people with multiple drug and alcohol con-

victions and illegal immigrants, the driver's license is an essential tool for all these people."

DMV spokesman Jones would not say whether North Carolina has any similar safeguards.

Responding to terrorism fears, North Carolina in December made it tougher to get a driver license by limiting the number of documents that could be used as proof of identity.

With the changes, people must prove they are N.C. residents and provide a Social Security number if they have one or a federal tax ID number if they do not. Under the old rules, a bank statement, a payroll stub or a matricula consular — a Mexican ID card — could prove identity.

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